



St. Francis de Sales Parish

Holland, Michigan

Usher Ministry Guidelines

What (is the ministry? How did it come into being?)

Ushers are the first people that parishioners and visitors encounter as they enter St. Francis de Sales Church. Nobody has a more significant impact on how Mass attendees form their initial impressions of our parish - **and the Church at large** - than ushers. You are first and foremost *ministers of hospitality*.

The predecessor of today's usher can be found in the clerical order of porter, instituted in the 3rd Century A.D. During those times, it was the duty of the porters or ushers to guard the door of the church against any intruders who might disturb the service. The porter duties were so important that they came to be included in the rite of ordination, where they were specified as: "to ring the bells, open the church and sacristy, to open the book for the preacher." In 1972 Pope Paul VI abolished the order of porter and this important task was given over to the laity.¹ Today ushers are critical agents of hospitality **to** and **for** the people of God.

Why (is it important?)

St. Paul instructed the Romans to "welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you" (Rom 15:7). When we invite people into our homes, we do everything we can to help them feel comfortable, relaxed, and at home. We clean our houses, prepare meals, and offer the most comfortable seats to our guests. If we are to be active, intentional disciples who invite others into a personal, ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ, the least we can do is greet them at church in an engaging, cheerful, helpful, and hospitable manner. Ushers, as ministers of hospitality, should convey their enthusiasm for everyone's presence at Mass, and their unbridled hope that they will return - and soon.

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As an usher two excellent sources that will help you become better informed about the critical importance of the ministry of hospitality, please see:

- The Ministry of Hospitality by Thomas Richstatter at:
<https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/483/article/ministry-hospitality>
- Hospitality Ministry Training Video at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ms-HPbljQTM>

Who (can serve and is served?)

Ushers, as ministers of hospitality, are people who follow a Christian life of service to others, have received the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation and are joyful and grateful witnesses who give thanks for life's blessings and bring God's presence to others. Training is required so that ministers of hospitality understand and perform their responsibilities appropriately.

When (is the ministry to be carried out?)

Ushers, as ministers of hospitality, carry out their ministry before, during, and after Mass.

Where (is the ministry to be performed?)



Ushers generally welcome parishioners and visitors in the Gathering Space as they enter and depart church. Ushers also minister to worshipers in the sanctuary of the church. Ushers, as ministers of hospitality, are first and foremost intentional disciples of Jesus Christ who bring his light to others wherever they are found - on the street, in the parking lot, or on the sidewalk.

How (is the ministry performed?)

Chris Walker offers the following ten general tips for all ministers of hospitality:

1. Smile.
2. Fresh breath.
3. Make eye contact
4. Take initiative and greet.
5. Don't ask "Are you new?"
6. Don't ask "Is this your first time?"
7. Offer a bulletin if your church uses them. (Note: St. Francis does, and these should be distributed by ushers as people leave at the conclusion of Mass)
8. Personal warmth — look like you enjoy welcoming people.
9. Say "I don't think I've met you yet, I'm {insert your name here}"
10. If they are new, offer to show them where the restrooms are and offer to answer any questions that they may have.

In addition to the above:

1. Once Mass has begun and everyone has arrived, please take a seat in the back of church and fully participate in the Mass. This includes all the prayers, and hymns, as well as attentively listen to the scriptures that are part of the Mass. Remember that you too are part of the Body of Christ gathered for the Mass. Please also avoid any unnecessary conversations within the church during Mass.
2. Read the Scriptures daily. Pray for enlightenment about what you've read. Consider signing up for a daily email from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops at <https://www.usccb.org/> of the scriptures for each day, and/or a daily Gospel reflection at <https://faith.nd.edu/s/1210/faith/interior.aspx?sid=1210&gid=609&pgid=5683&cid=15492>.
3. Prayerfully prepare for your critical ministry using this or a similar prayer:

*Welcoming and gracious God, whose love and compassion are boundless, place in us a desire to greet each person we meet with the same love, compassion, and respect we would show to You. Help us to see Your face in every person, and to serve your people with dignity and care. Bless us as we seek to love as you loved and serve as you served. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen*

Specific Guidelines for Ushers

Before Mass:

1. Please arrive 20-30 minutes before Mass begins. Make sure the church is ready to receive the people as they arrive:
 - a. Check in with the Mass Coordinator for specific roles and responsibilities and your assigned station number.
 - b. Ensure that doors are unlocked.
 - c. Walk around the Gathering Space, sanctuary, and rest rooms to ensure that they are in a clean and orderly state.
 - d. Ensure that the collection baskets are ready in the back of the sanctuary for the offertory.
 - e. Do a quick check of the sidewalk to ensure that snow and ice have been removed.
2. Warmly welcome and greet everyone as they enter the church. Remember that yours is a ministry of hospitality and welcome.
3. Be prepared to answer any questions regarding the location of the elevator, information table, restrooms, multipurpose room, work sacristy, lost and found, first aid kit, bulletins, drinking fountains and where to leave food, etc. In general, it is important to always be warm, welcoming, and hospitable to the community as they gather for Mass.
4. If you suspect that Mass will fill up, it is recommended that ushers rope off a few pews in the back of church to encourage people to pack in the pews earlier to be able to open up the last ones when there are no other seats available.
5. As the church fills up, it may be necessary to assist those who arrive late in finding a seat. You may need to walk with them to find an available space. It may also be necessary to ask those already seated to sit more closely together.

As Mass Starts:

6. Close the sanctuary doors when the Mass begins.
7. If Mass has already begun, do not seat people during the reading from Scripture as it is a distraction to those listening. Please wait for the break between the readings. The Opening Prayer, the break between readings, or Alleluia that precedes the Gospel reading are good times to seat latecomers.

Collection:

8. During the Prayers of the Faithful, get ready to assist in the collection.
Proceed immediately down your assigned aisle after the Offertory song has been announced. Bow deeply and reverently toward the altar and then pass the collection basket to the first person in the first pew, who will hand it to his/her neighbor in succession.
9. The collection is then placed and sealed in a bag (marked with the Mass time) and signed by the two ushers assigned by the Mass Coordinator. This is done in the Sacristy immediately after the collection is taken. The sealed bag is then placed in the safe.



Communion:

10. When the priest begins to distribute Communion to the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Eucharist (Eucharistic Ministers), the ushers should begin to dismiss the people to go to Communion, **beginning with the front pews and working backward**. The goal is to have the people lined up by the time the Eucharistic Ministers are in place.
11. The Ushers should also be prepared to direct the Eucharistic Ministers to any parishioners with mobility issues needing communion brought to them at their pew. Also, if an usher witnesses any accidents involving the Body or Blood of Christ, they should make the Eucharistic Minister aware of it right away, since they have been trained on the proper way to handle this situation.

At the End of Mass:

12. From time to time, a second collection will be requested. This usually happens after Communion. Be prepared to assist with this.

After Mass:

13. Open the sanctuary doors to facilitate the exit of people. Close the doors once most of the people have exited to ensure that conversation in the gathering space does not carry into the sanctuary where people stay late to pray.
14. Ushers are to be present at the end of Mass to once again greet and thank everyone as they leave the sanctuary, as well as distribute bulletins to people as they exit at the end of Mass.
15. Go through the sanctuary to tidy up any hymnals, bulletins, or other items that may have been left behind. One usher can check with the priest to see if you can be of any further assistance before leaving.

Before, During, or After Mass:

16. In case of an emergency be prepared to take action. Call 911 in case of a medical emergency, or fire, or to contact the police. Retrieve the automated external defibrillator (AED) from the back hallway if it is needed.
17. In the small Ushers Room, you can find a first aid kit, stretcher, baskets, ropes and other items which may be needed.



Safety Issues & Procedures:

Although rare, our churches, schools and religious institutions of every size are vulnerable to violent attacks. Religious leadership has an obligation to recognize the need for safety and security at our parishes no matter how large or small. In all likelihood, the probability of an active shooter at your parish is statistically remote. You are more likely to experience cardiac arrest or other medical emergencies. Therefore, it is equally important to create and emergency plan for medial situations as you would for security against an active shooter. Every type of emergency should be considered and planned for to include attacks, disruptions,

medical weather, fire, etc. Plans should include practices and procedures for each of these situations. ([Source: Catholic Mutual Group Parish Safety & Security Guide](#))

The creation of a Safety/Security Team to develop a formal plan for dealing with the wide variety of possible safety and security issues is recommended. **In the meantime, as ushers, you are our first line of defense to protect and address safety issues or medical emergencies that may occur within the church.**